ERIC Document Resume	See Instruction Sheet	DATE OF RESUME 10/13/65	DATE RECEIVED

A. PUBLICATION DATA

1. ERIC NUMBER	2. ORIGINATOR CONTROL NO(S)	3. IDENTIFICATION NO.
ED002283	N.A.	N.A.

DO NOT WRITE IN SPACE BELOW

4. AUTHOR(S):
Brazziel, William F.

5. TITLE OF DOCUMENT ABSTRACTED:
Working with Students Inside and Outside the Classroom in Adult Basic Education Programs

6. PUBLICATION TITLE:
N.A.

7. EDITOR(S):
N.A.

8. PLACE OF ORIGIN
ORG. Virginia State College at Norfolk,
ST. Norfolk, Virginia
CITY, STATE

9. PUBLISHER OR SOURCE
Virginia State College at Norfolk
Norfolk, Virginia

TELE. EXT.
INST/LOC CODE

10. VOL.	11. PAGES	12. MO./YR.	13. TOTAL PP.
N.A.	N.A.	10/64	7

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TYPE OF REPORT
PROPOSAL ☐
IN-PROGRESS ☐
FINAL ☒
FOLLOW-UP ☐

OTHER ERIC REFERENCES:

ERIC SATELLITE CODE

B. INDEXING DATA

14. SUBJECT AREA

15. TYPE OF ENDEAVOR Report

16. INDEXING TERMS (6-12)

adult education	basic education	technical education	unemployed	staff
personal problems	financial problems	recruitment	family projects	
college project	Negro	teachers		

17. ABSTRACT (MAX. 280 WORDS)

Technical education of the adult hard-core unemployed often fails because of personal problems and basic education and cultural lacks. A broad concept of education is essential to programs for development of technical skills. A college project designed to meet these requirements is presented.

A combination of basic and technical education with the treatment of the whole adult was fundamental to the program and proved to be an effective approach. The experiment began with the selection of very needy people who did not understand or see the usual advertising media. Many, despite personal contact, rejected the program; these people were among the most ignorant and in the severest financial difficulties.

The staff consisted of specialists in reading, language arts, mathematics, and guidance. A social worker helped solve personal problems. Technical work was used successfully as a teaching vehicle to achieve basic skills. The staff worked with the students on special projects such as publishing a paper and attending cultural and athletic events. Whole family outings were organized. The guidance staff held sessions on budgeting, financing, child care, and family planning.

Results were favorable. A technical skill was learned by 90 men who increased reading and number ability by an average of three years. Almost all found jobs. The most insoluble problems were those of the men in extremely bad financial conditions. For success in such programs, means must be found to ease the financial strains during training so that these families will not remain permanent welfare cases.

ERIC No.

18. SOURCE OF ABSTRACT

C. FUNDING DATA

19. SUPPORTING ORGANIZATION	20. DIVISION OR DEPT.	21. CONTRACT NO. / PROJECT NO.
	22. TOTAL COST OF PROJECT	
	23. DURATION OR PROJECT	U.S. Department of Health, Education, and Welfare Office of Education

ED002283

WORKING WITH STUDENTS INSIDE AND OUTSIDE THE CLASSROOM IN ADULT BASIC EDUCATION PROGRAMS *

by

Wm. F. Brazziel
Director of General Education
Virginia State College at Norfolk
Norfolk, Virginia

Successful programs of basic education depend on skillful and dedicated teachers and administrators working long hours with the students both in and out of the classroom. In dealing with severly impoverished adults or what has been termed the "hard-core unemployed," almost every application of pertinent psychological, sociological and pedagogical principles will be necessary for success.

Skillful techniques must first be employed to enroll the "hard-core" person in the adult education program. Lacking in basic education, he often cannot understand the modes of communications used to recruit students for these programs. Lacking also in basic education, the "hard-core" student often fails to meet the entrance requirements of the new technical education programs which are being initiated. Too often he fails to do well in the program if somehow he is able to enroll.

Planners must experiment freely with various approaches to recruitment, pre-technical basic education, linking basic education to technical program, to the teaching-learning process itself and to the methods of assisting adults with personal problems which are often the causes of high attrition rates in adult education programs. As educators have thought for many years in terms of the "whole child," so, perhaps, must we begin to think in terms of the "whole adult."

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An example of a vigorous application of effort in these areas is the

* Abstract of presentation to National Association of Public School Adult Educators - San Francisco. October. 1964

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OFFICE OF EDUCATION

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experimental and demonstration project of the Manpower Development and Training program. It became apparent early in the implementation of this Act that retraining programs for youth and adults must take cognizance of the levels of competences in basic language and number skills of many prospective trainees if retraining was to be effective. While persons with low basic skills levels did not constitute all of the prospective participants in the program, they did constitute a large part of the total. These inadequacies in basic education hampered both the recruitment and training of students.

Prospective students with low basic skills levels fell into three basic categories. There were those who had never been to school or who had completed less than three grades and who were classified as illiterates. There were the "industrial illiterates" who had finished more than three but less than eight years of school and there was a group of workers, heretofore largely unnoticed, but who had to be reckoned with, who had high levels of schooling but low levels of skills competence. It was not uncommon to find large numbers of prospective MDT students who performed at levels of achievement which were two and sometimes three grades levels beneath the grade completed in school.

In addition to basic skills competence, it became apparent that MDT programs must give attention to the competencies in occupational information and human relations which are necessary for successful occupational mobility of the worker. The new job being trained for often required a greater sophistication in these competencies than the worker's previous education and occupational experiences could be reasonably expected to prepare him. Methods of finding and securing a job and maintaining optimal relationships with supervisors and fellow-workers, for an example, were different from previous patterns. The patterns of advancement on the job, continuing development of skills in-

service, lateral occupational movement and adjustment to the incidence of obsolescence of present skills were also different. In many cases, it was apparent that the students could also benefit from broadened concepts of the management of financial affairs and, in some instances, of personal-social affairs.

Successful development of students with these characteristics requires the application of a broad concept of basic education and the development of efficient approaches to the problems involved. Our college carried out a research project designed to develop such a system. This project attempted to explore the possibilities of raising basic skills levels and developing competencies in occupational information and human relations in conjunction with retraining in technical skills. It was supported by research grants from the U.S. Office of Education and the Office of Manpower, Automation and Training.

Results of the project were gratifying. The 90 men involved learned a technical skill (masonry, auto-mechanics, electronics, metal work and maintenance). The average reading and number ability of the group was raised about three years and their personal competencies improved. Almost all found good jobs.

The results of this and other projects may have vital implications for adult education. While attempts at upgrading adult literacy have too often suffered from a lack of motivation on the part of the adults themselves and while attempts at upgrading the technical skills levels of adults have suffered from the lack of adult literacy, both attempted in conjuncture, as in the Norfolk project, might well prove an effective approach. As was shown here, in the Chicago-Yellow cab project, on a pre-technical MDT project on Maryland's Eastern Shore, and in others, adults have a way of becoming literate very fast when there

are definite and immediate rewards in the offing.

Experimentation in our project began with recruitment. After the usual advertising of the courses in mass media failed to attract students, the staff took to the streets in a grass roots recruitment drive which involved visits to bars, pool halls, barber shops and store front churches in depressed areas of the city and the enlistment of the aid of ministers and businessmen in explaining the project and its benefits. The classes were soon filled.

A team of educators and social psychologists completed a study in depth of the factors influencing the decisions of men who rejected the offer of retraining. A total of 314 men were interviewed in this study which was underwritten by OMAT.

The study revealed that few men had rejected the opportunity for retraining out-of-hand. A lack of understanding of the program, in spite of the grass roots selling campaign, coupled with severe financial problems were the most influential factors in the decisions to forego training. The enrollers also had broader education, work, travel and military experiences than the rejecters. This probably contributed greatly to their ability to grasp the meaning of the program more quickly.

Significantly, most men in this study who misunderstood the program when invited to participate stated that as a result of observing the program in operation, they understood it at the time of the interviews (10 months later) and wanted to enter training. Re-education also ranked highest in their opinions regarding the solutions to employment.

There are implications for planners of adult education programs in this experience, it seems:

1. There is an increasingly acute appreciation of the necessity of education on the part of the adult worker. This appreciation will grow as technology

decimates the ranks of the unskilled.

2. Community and grass roots programs of recruitment are necessary in attempting to enroll "hard-core" adults.

3. Even with the most vigorous programs of recruitment there will be a large group of men who will not understand the requirements and benefits involved in an adult education program. These men will live in a sub-culture characterized by great lacks in literacy skills.

4. For this group, the operation of a successful demonstration program in their communities coupled with information programs which invite them in to observe the training and which enlist the aid of people they trust in their decision making processes will be successful in structuring their concepts and attitudes toward re-education.

The fusing of basic and technical education yielded valuable lessons in this project. The staff for the basic education course of study consisted of specialists in reading, language arts, mathematics and guidance, the latter teaching courses in occupational information and human relations. This group took an almost literal view of the concept of the "whole adult." In addition to classroom work, where the technical work was used as a teaching vehicle, they worked with the students to publish a project paper, they urged them into attendance at college forums; concerts and athletic events, they assigned work in the college and community library, worked humanities films and lectures into the courses and brought in college and community experts for sessions on budgeting, financing, child care and family planning.

The staff in this area found that their experiences with the men followed the axiom that adults' backgrounds of experiences fit them unusually well for learning basic education skills. They concluded further that when this instruction is related closely to technical education, motivation is increased considerably.

A final project concern might aptly be termed student personnel services.

It involved the program of professional assistance to the enrollees with personal problems. A full-time social worker was attached to the project for this purpose. The staff was quite unprepared, however, for the multitude of problems which beset men in this strata of society. Things just seem to happen to them. Everyone was forced to pitch in and help with the problems on occasion.

Services to the enrollees included the establishment of a credit union, requests for extensions of time to creditors, talks to law and court officers on a few occasions concerning minor offenses, and personal counseling for stress cases. The wives of the men were organized into an auxillary with the college underwriting several lunches, dinners and a beach outing for this group and their children. Some of the children were given camp scholarships by private donors. A Christmas party was also held.

Some of the most insoluble financial cases yielded the most profound lessons in this effort: that if communities are to struggle successfully against the growing economic dependency of its unskilled, it must direct its disparate welfare agencies to combine with programs of re-education for the severely deprived and offer a family the necessary support, and thus peace of mind, over the training period to enable the head of the family to gain the skills to re-enter the work force. Our project was never able to gain this concert of support. Others have been more successful. A good base of support would include multiple financing from the welfare agencies area to assure a minimum living standard, free school lunches for children and their parent-trainees, well-baby clinics and family health care. Food stamps and surplus food might also be brought into the plan. The families thus aided will return this investment in two years or so in reduced welfare expenses, buying power and taxes. Communities which are short sighted in this respect are storing up trouble and misery for later years.

Adult educators who are concerned with the basic skills aspects of adult learning would presently seem to be in a position to make great strides toward the elimination of illiteracy and low basic skills levels in our country. The 1963 basic education amendments of the MDT Act provided for 20 weeks of government sponsored pre-technical training in basic education and 52 additional weeks of basic education in conjunction with technical training. The Economic Opportunity Act provides for basic education in the Job Corps, Training Centers and in the Community Action Programs. Our existing basic education programs can be expected to expand as people feel more acutely the need for development. Application of efficient techniques for reaching those who need assistance greatly will assume a very high priority. Additional research and development funds and projects will be needed if ways are to be found to work with what has been termed the "growing lumpenproletariat"; that floating mass of disheartened, disenchanted and alienated people who inhabit so much of our rural and urban slums. We are far from knowing all the right answers here. But we must know these answers and we must help these people and help their children if our country is to be perfected in the image of its founders and the American dream of opportunity for all is to become a reality.